

## **Testimony of Sheila Lee Chun**

### **In support of the Asian Pacific American Commission**

I am a twenty-five year old, Korean-American and I was born and raised in Fairfield County, Connecticut. My parents immigrated over to America for a chance at a better life and had dreams of opening their own small business. Life in their home country of South Korea would have unfairly punished them for things that were beyond their control, including the effects of early childhood poverty and poor education. My life would have been totally different had I been born and raised in South Korea and to many people and even acquaintances my life today seems wonderful. But what a glimpse might seem to outsiders does not accurately portray the struggles my parents and my siblings had to go through on a daily basis.

I seem assimilated in many ways because I am a product of my environment. However, the difference stems from the household discussions, pressures and social norms that transcend my nationality. Most Asian cultures stress the importance of succeeding in school, which combined with an automatic “work hard” mentality, hurts the prospect of any individuality or ability to deviate from the incredible dream of having a child that goes to an Ivy League school.

This mentality has also hurt so many people like my cousin who came from South Korea at the age of eight years old and was placed in regular classes. He was never provided with ESL classes or English assistance and it was assumed he would figure it out on his own. This poor transition only further scarred him when he came home with C's, D's, and F's on his report card only because he was unable to understand the language. The work hard and succeed in school mentality only pushed him to never ask for help and just try on his own as best as he could. He is now twenty-four years old and has developed imperfect language skills. Many of these educational disparities could have been easily recognized and remedied and though individual schools have currently developed their own ESL programs, they were not around for countless others that had to suffer the embarrassment, shame, and difficulty of learning a language and culture without any assistance.

In many ways, these pressures and expectations to succeed clash with many of the American ideals of being an individual and being embraced for your own aspirations and ideas. In other ways, the mentality of working hard and having high expectations is also reflected in our parents' motivations to pour sweat, tears, and endless hours into the appearance and success of successful small business owners and law abiding citizens.

The problem with the model minority stereotype and the reason why APAC is so necessary is because there are many issues that need to be addressed that have gone silent for so many years and for a span of time older than my existence on this earth. The sad part about becoming a successful business owner and responsible citizen of the community is that never relying on others only masks the fact that there are deep problems and sacrifices made every day at the expense of their own health and social well-being. I have gone the majority of my life without health insurance and my parents have paid dearly for the annual check ups, school required vaccinations, or a visit to the dentist. My parents have always given to charities, helped out in the local community, and actively supported others while being unable to seek advice, ask for help or take care of themselves and their own. It pains me to grow up and see the many ways their lives are disadvantaged when they also have so many proud achievements. I believe APAC is important because it finally provides some sort of medium that take account of not just the fellow Asians who outwardly may need some help but also those who have always been responsible citizens of the community and have become US citizens. In many ways, this initiative is important to me because I feel it is finally a way to represent the citizens that make up our community and take care of citizens that deserve at least some recognition.

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